



time, "what one author says on these points is the antithesis of what the other says."<sup>4</sup> It is through his use of such antithetical similarities that Gide alludes to *René* as an intertextual model and fosters irony.

An ironic note can also be discerned in Gide's novel if we compare the revelations which the female protagonists make in *René* and *Isabelle*. Amélie writes to René, obliquely alluding to her secret passion, in elegiacal, romantic sentences such as the following: ". . . je songerai à ces promenades que je faisais avec vous au milieu des bois, alors que nous croyions retrouver le bruit des mers dans la cime agitée des pins" (p. 57). Isabelle, in contrast, writes a letter to her lover Blaise de Gonfreville, whom she will have murdered by her servant, in which she expresses concern about such uninspiring topics as robbing her mother's jewelry or getting her feet wet when she and her lover elope. In both style and content, Isabelle's letter displays the kind of antithetical similarities to Amélie's which promote irony.

It is also worth noting in this regard the contrasting ways in which the final revelations are made. René's saintly sister Amélie, at the moment of taking her vows, lets the awful truth escape from her lips; and the somber setting of a church helps to sanctify and excuse her sin. The object of Gérard's romantic illusions, the manipulative and mendacious Isabelle, makes her revelation in the same setting in which René told his story to Chactas and le père Souel, that is, in a natural setting, seated at what would have been the foot of a tree, had Isabelle not had the tree chopped down; she has thereby demonstrated her disregard for that nature so venerated by Chateaubriand and his Romantic generation. Thus whereas the narrative setting in *René* encourages the reader to excuse Amélie for her "sin," the antithetically similar setting in *Isabelle* encourages the reader to condemn Isabelle for hers.

We can conclude this consideration of Gide's ironic intertextual use of *René* in *Isabelle* by observing, following critic Anne L. Martin, that *Isabelle* has wrongly been associated by critics more with Gide's *récits* than with his novels, that is, more with a morally than with an aesthetically focused kind of fiction. As Martin reminds us, Gérard is, *inter alia*, an aspiring novelist; and she notes that "Gide . . . by centring his story on a would-be novelist and not on a morally reprehensible heroine, shifted its centre of gravity from an ethical to an aesthetic axis . . . Despite its masquerade as a *récit*, *Isabelle* is in the lineage not of *La Porte étroite*, but of *Paludes* and of *Les Caves* and *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, for which it clears the way."<sup>5</sup> Intertextuality in *Isabelle*—that work's self-conscious, ironic reference to its literary predecessors and conventions—lends significant additional support to Martin's interpretation of the novel. And by extension, it lends additional support to the case which I, for one, would want to make about Gide, namely that there is a truly literary nature to all of his narrative texts—texts which in the past were perhaps scrutinized too often for their superficial philosophical and personal models and too rarely for their profound intertextual, properly novelistic ones.

## "*Watership Down*: Tale and Myth"

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By the end of 1972, Rex Collings, a small British publisher, took the risk of publishing Richard Adams's first literary attempt, a novel about talking rabbits called *Watership Down*. Despite the fact that the book had been rejected by several agents and publishers before Collings, *Watership Down* became an enormous success,

<sup>4</sup> Goran Hermeran, *Influence in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> Anne L. Martin, "Isabelle, or André Gide at the Crossroads," *Essays in French Literature*, 14 (1977), 44-45.

a film was made and Adams, now rich and famous, decided to give up his job in the civil service to become a full-time writer.

However, what are the reasons for the public's positive response? A few answers have been given by critics over the last few years (see, for instance, James S. Stone, "The Rabbitness of *Watership Down*," *The English Quarterly*, 13, 1980, 37-46). Nevertheless, the key to the understanding of the novel's success has never been pointed out; to a large extent the success of Adams's book is due to the fact that it subjects the reader to a two-sided defamiliarization. In order to explain this process it is necessary to examine the relationship between a number of technical devices used by Adams, and the nature of the adventure itself.

*Watership Down* began as an oral narrative; Adams told his two small daughters the rabbits' tale to entertain them during several journeys to Stratford-upon-Avon. Later on he decided to write his tale down. This explains to a certain extent the existence of some links which connect the novel to the folktale. The involvement of the readers—of the audience—is all-important, and the storyteller does not hesitate in addressing his public now and then in order to draw them closer to the plot: "And 'what happened in the end?' asks the reader, who has followed Hazel and his comrades in all their adventures and returned with them at last to the warren where Fiver brought them from the fields of Sandleford." Together with this device two other techniques work successfully to force the reader to become more involved in the rabbits' story. The first one is the traditional indirect free style, by means of which the characters' doubts and worries are scattered all throughout the book, as in the case of Hazel, the rabbit leader who, through the narrator's voice, asks himself, "What was in the bracken? What lay around the further bend? And what would happen to a rabbit who left the shelter of the holly tree and ran down the path? He turned to Dandelion beside him" (p. 35). The second technical device to attract the reader's attention is not, however, as traditional as the indirect free style. It consists of the effect provoked in the reader when he is made to perceive external reality from a rabbit's point of view. All our senses must be continuously alert to follow the small animals in their quest: "The rabbits had gone only a short distance through the wood when they sensed that they were already near the river. The ground became soft and damp. They could smell sedge and water. Suddenly, the harsh, vibrating cry of a moorhen echoed through the trees, followed by a flapping of wings and a watery scuttering. The rustling of the leaves seemed also to echo, as though reflected distantly from hard ground. A little further on, they could distinctly hear the water itself—the low, continuous pouring of a shallow fall" (p. 298).

Furthermore, Hazel and his friends are talking rabbits but they do not wear clothes, smoke cigars, or do things which real rabbits could not physically do. Adams's intention is not only to draw a picture of the landscape in which the small animals live, he also wants us to identify with them, to perceive what rabbits perceive. The natural scenery in which the novel takes place—a landscape which the reader knows or thinks he knows—opens now from a new viewpoint, producing an effect of defamiliarization once we stop to think who the characters are and how they perceive the countryside of this part of twentieth-century England.

However, as previously mentioned, the defamiliarization in *Watership Down* has another side: the nature of the adventure itself. Adams is deeply influenced by Jung's works. He even underwent a full-scale Jungian psychoanalysis in the early 1950s which lasted for three years. Furthermore, he is also influenced by Joseph

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Adams, *Watership Down* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 476. Subsequent references are to this edition.

Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*<sup>2</sup>. Both authors—Jung and Campbell—pay considerable attention to myth in their works, pointing out that some cultural activities such as esoteric teaching, rites of passage, legends and tales are nothing less than external manifestations of man's psychic struggle to attain the ultimate meaning of life (or what Jung exactly terms "the integration of the personality"). According to Campbell (*The Hero*, p. 75) these expressions of the human inner struggle flow a pattern which he denominates "monomyth" and which develops in the form of a journey in which the protagonist—the hero—must overcome several or all the possible stages in which the adventure may be divided and which eventually lead him to achieve the final answer or magic elixir of the quest; many human heroes have followed these stages throughout history and literature, and a careful analysis shows that *Watership Down*, a previous oral tale, is also closely related to the monomyth: In Adams's tale there is a small buck, Fiver, who is characterized by a strange power; he is a seer, a prophet, and that which Campbell names "Call to Adventure" (*The Hero*, p. 49)—the first stage in the monomyth—takes place when the small rabbit warns his brother Hazel that they should leave Sandleford warren because he perceives a danger, a "bad thing." "'It hasn't gone away,'" he says to Hazel. "'It's here—all round us. Don't tell me to forget about it and go to sleep. We've got to go away before it's too late'" (p. 21). The rabbit-seer represents here the first manifestation of what Campbell calls the "Supernatural Aid" (*The Hero*, p. 69), which comes to the hero in the form of a mysterious figure offering him advice or amulets to fulfill his quest.

The call is answered by Hazel and a small group of young bucks who depart from their warren, experiencing in that way the process of separation which characterizes the first stages of the monomyth. Once in motion, Hazel's band has to undergo "The Crossing of the First Threshold" (*The Hero*, p. 77), manifest in their swimming the little stream Enborne and coming into the wood, the unknown mysterious land where the hero's adventure must unfold. From this point onwards they have to overcome a number of dangers—Campbell's "Road of Trials" (*The Hero*, p. 97)—such as the fights with a crow and some rats and their fears of badgers and foxes. In this way, Hazel's band becomes integrated little by little into a compact unity, the real hero who shall achieve his main aim in the book's second part. Even the narrator makes this idea clear when he affirms that since "leaving the warren of the snares [the rabbits] had become warier, shrewder, a tenacious band who understood each other and worked together" (p. 130). The second essential period of the monomyth, the process of initiation, ends when the rabbits obtain the "magic elixir" represented by the does, the female principle without which life cannot continue. The reaching of this stage is what Campbell calls the "Meeting with the Goddess" (*The Hero*, p. 109) but, once the elixir has been acquired, its former guardian may want it back and pursues the adventurer in a "Magic Flight" (*The Hero*, p. 196) which is also registered in Adams's novel when General Woundwort—the leader of the warren from which the does were stolen—tracks down Hazel's band and besieges Watership warren. However, the hero is bound to become the winner, and Hazel's brains and Bigwig's strength achieve the final victory defeating Woundwort and granting, in this way, the survival of the new warren.

The final stage of the monomyth comes when the hero—the psychic struggler—experiences the vision of the cosmogonic cycle; he perceives life (material forms) running into death and the void but he also witnesses the ceaseless action of the Imperishable, the source of existence which gives birth to life again from the void. *Watership Down* is certainly not a metaphysical work of the kind other novels by Adams were to become (mainly *The Plague Dogs*, 1977) a few years later. But the

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Bolingen Series 17 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949; 2nd. ed. 1968). Subsequently referred to as *The Hero*.

novelist also wants to suggest the hero's final vision of the cosmogonic cycle and so he starts and concludes his first book in a symbolic way. He begins with "The *primroses* were over" and he finishes by closing the circle—the cycle: "and together [Hazel and El-ahrairah] slipped away, running easily down through the wood, where the first *primroses* were beginning to bloom" (emphasis added).

Defamiliarization was made possible, therefore, by a number of closely inter-related factors. *Watership Down's* characters are a group of twentieth-century English rabbits who physically behave almost as real rabbits do. The narrator brings us closer to them by very often focusing the story from these small animals' viewpoint. Finally, the story itself proves to be an adaptation of the monomyth; the rabbits walk along the same path which many a great human hero—real or fictitious—has followed from the beginning of time. Furthermore, this path has been understood by many—Adams among them—as the external expression of man's inner struggle to search for the meaning of life; therefore, we can also speak of a conscious psychological appeal on the part of the author. But, after all, the truth which remains is that the mythical hero who fights almost to the death to fulfill his quest is a simple small rabbit—or, to be more precise, a group of rabbits. Defamiliarization arose because the storyteller, coming again from the past, has chosen to tell us the old adventure of a new mythical rabbit-hero.

## Orienting Huxley: On B. L. Chakoo's *Aldous Huxley and Eastern Wisdom*

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Indian scholars continue to applaud Huxley's quest for a religious solution to life's problems. Westerners, however, can seldom generate a reciprocal respect for Huxley's oriental admirers. Indian commentators have difficulty deciding whom to write for, their countrymen or the intellectual community at large. Their studies invariably fall victim to egregious printers' errors or succumb to a faulty grasp of the idiomatic. Worst of all, a bothersome chauvinism encourages Indian critics to interpret an occidental's orientalism as a cultural victory for East over West.

In *Aldous Huxley and Eastern Wisdom* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983), B. L. Chakoo offers a recapitulation of the aforementioned. Sensing an audience with mixed needs, the author outlines a Western novelist's career for Eastern readers while showing Western audiences the increasingly oriental cast of Huxley's later vision. Plot summaries of the novels compete with synopses of religious texts in a self-defeating process that depletes space badly needed for argument in support of more important conjectures. Admittedly, the Westerner adds to his stock of Sanskrit phrases but wishes more of the key terms for major concepts had been glossed at length. The Easterner improves his recollection of character and incident in Huxley's fictions but probably wishes these works were analyzed more imaginatively.

Chakoo perpetuates the Indian tradition of concentration-destroying faux pas: You "were born a pagan," Denis is quoted as saying to Anne Wimbush, while